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Mr Roger Burman
Headteacher
Winterhill School
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Dear Mr Burman

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 and 14 October 2009 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Particular thanks to the students who spoke with me, and to the chair of governors and local authority officers for our discussions on the telephone.

Since the last inspection in January 2009, the school governors have made several new appointments to the teaching staff including to the senior leadership team. There are two new strategic leaders and a head of English. A new head of science is to be appointed in 2010. The strategic leader of science and technology is currently taking a lead role in science pending this appointment. New teaching staff have been appointed in the English and science departments. The local authority has supported the school by providing additional School Improvement Partner time as a consultant one day per week and consultancy support in English, mathematics and science.

As a result of the inspection on 14–15 January 2009, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and improve progress at Key Stage 4, especially in English and science, and improve the progress of boys
- improve the use of assessment and tracking data to support academic learning so that all students know how well they are doing and how to improve
- increase the amount and consistency of good teaching so that support and challenge in lessons are matched to identified learning needs

- Improve the rigour of quality assurance procedures at all levels of subject leadership and management, so that middle leaders have greater impact on improving students' achievement and standards.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

The provisional GCSE results for 2009 show overall improvement from the previous year. The proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades is 69% which is significantly better than the 50% achieved in 2008. The prior attainment of these two year groups is broadly similar and, consequently, demonstrates substantial improvement in the progress made by the 2009 cohort. However, the proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics is much lower at 45% and is below the school's target. While this is an improvement on 2008, standards by this measure remain below average. This is largely due to students' achievement in mathematics which at 52% A* to C, is significantly below the school's target of 60%. The school met its English target of 60%. In science the school increased the percentage achieving grades A* to C from 26% in 2008 to 54% in 2009. This result almost reached the school's target of 55%. The school has successfully narrowed the gap between boys' and girls' achievements as a result of the better progress made by boys. Taken overall, the standards attained by students in English and science have risen and the rate of progress has improved satisfactorily.

The school's senior leadership, governors and the local authority acted decisively to tackle the weaknesses in subject leadership. Through a combination of new staff appointments and effective support and training for staff, the procedures for monitoring, evaluating and improving the school's work are much more rigorous. These procedures are at an early stage of impacting fully on students' outcomes. Students agree that the changes are improving lessons and increasing their expectations of what they can achieve. For example, the procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching have a much stronger emphasis on judging the amount of progress made by students in lessons. The school has identified strong practitioners as 'leaders in learning' to partner and mentor other staff. Additionally, the school's classroom procedures policy is beginning to become fully embedded in practice. Planning formats are more consistent and include opportunities for regular assessment of students' work. The analysis of data about students' attainment is a much more prominent focus of subject department accountability and scrutiny.

Improvements to the quality of teaching include more regular and consistent use of assessment data to inform students about how well they are doing and what they should learn next. Although not yet in place across all classes, a large proportion of lesson plans include detailed consideration of the prior attainment of students, so that tasks and activities in lessons are well matched to students' needs. In the strongest lessons, teachers take full account of the different learning styles of

students providing a range of experiences and activities. Typically, in these lessons, there is effective use made of illustrations, diagrams, photographs and charts, together with written texts and digitally projected images. There is good pace to teaching which moves students learning on quickly and sequentially. In these classrooms, very good use is made of the learning environment to motivate students' interest through bright displays of work which value students' efforts. There is good behaviour and sound relationships between students and with teachers in all lessons. The proportions of good and better lessons are increasing and this is seen in the monitoring evidence of the school. In science and English it is significantly improved. Although satisfactory progress is being made, there is still some way to go before there is sufficient good teaching to ensure that all students make satisfactory progress in all subjects. The progress made for example, by students in English and science, judged inadequate at the last inspection is improving. In some other subjects, such as mathematics, the improvement has not been as good and in history, whilst results improved from 2008, performance remains well below national standards. The school is aware of these issues and has suitable plans in place to rectify the problems. The current school monitoring of students' progress in mathematics shows that standards are rising and that the school's challenging targets are likely to be met in 2010. In history, however, the school recognises that more interventions are needed to ensure that students reach their goals.

The school has specialist technology college status. In this area the standards achieved by students are consistently above the national average. The quality of teaching is consistently good and the school meets the targets set for continuing specialist status. The school is increasing the impact of the department's strong practice on other subjects. The strategic leader for technology and science is utilising more time in the subject lead of science, lead teachers are mentoring and coaching other teachers and the effective planning and assessment systems are being more widely shared with other departments.

The local authority provides good and effective support to the school's leadership. The additional leadership capacity provided by the consultant headteacher has ensured greater consistency in the middle management monitoring of the quality of teaching by providing training and support for middle leaders. The consultants for English, mathematics and science have provided professional development for all staff in the skills of assessment and tracking students' progress. The local authority action plan is fit for purpose following amendments to the initial plan. It details the support for the school and outlines the expectations for students' achievements.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Coleman
Her Majesty's Inspector